

**THE CIRCUM-CARIBBEAN
(BOLIVARIAN-GRENADINE) WAR, April-2017 REVIEW**
Geoffrey Demarest

Abstract

An irregular war is on-going in northern South America and the Caribbean. Some events plausibly looming in the near and mid-terms (1-12 years) could compel or invite an increased application of US resources, including military. The principal villain organizations include the Colombian FARC and ELN; remnant, dissident and spinoff guerrillas from these two; the government of Venezuela, and the government of Cuba. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review did not address the conflict.¹ Indeed, with the exception of transnational crime, most unclassified US strategic policy and analysis documents published during the past several years only highlight extra-regional foreign actors such as Hezbollah, Russia, or China, and generally dismiss autochthonous challenges.² For instance, Rand Arroyo Center's 2015 does not include the terms *FARC*, *Cuba*, or *Venezuela*.³ Nevertheless, several organizations, which this paper aggregates under the term 'Bolivarian', conspire to monopolize political power, dominate means of production, product movement and wealth accumulation, and secure impunity for their leaders. They are habitual violators of basic human rights. Their wealth accumulation is bound to several activities generally considered inimical to the rule of law. Their geostrategic pronouncements and alignments are almost invariably inimical to US interests. They are, in effect, perpetually in low-grade war (as a matter of intention, initiative and identity) against the United States, its interests and allies. Unfortunately, it appears that the one US-allied national government in the region (Colombia's) that had been actively prosecuting the war against the Bolivarians has either dropped

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out of the fight or changed sides. Although the Colombian electorate rejected via plebiscite a negotiated settlement with the FARC, Colombian President Manuel Santos disregarded the plebiscite results and, with support of the Cuban government, proceeded to implement the agreement. That process greatly advantages the FARC and other Bolivarian leaders including the Venezuelan and Cuban governments.⁴ Venezuela appears on the brink of a precipitous societal collapse due in great measure to the incompetence of its dictatorship. Little possibility remains that the Venezuelan population can effect positive political change without outside help, and accommodations made to the FARC and to Cubans by the Colombian government make such outside help more problematic. Armed clandestine services may be consequential actors in the war.

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**THE CIRCUM-CARIBBEAN
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Geoffrey Demarest

(This paper updates and expands upon an essay published in *Small Wars Journal* in 2014.⁵
Some of the text from the 2014 essay has been left intact as still operative.)

Classification of the war. A look at operational, financial and logistic aspects of the warfare in Colombia confronts us with a reality of selectively interwoven borders, transnational and intercontinental supply lines, and interventionist neighbors. Colombia's war has been as much an international struggle as an internal one. It is logically counterproductive to divorce the government and territory of Venezuela, for instance, from organized violence in Colombia. Too many of the war's lines of communication pass into and from Venezuelan territory. Too many alliances, shared interests, money flows and family ties exist among the illegal armed groups operating inside both Colombia and Venezuela. Concomitantly, it would be incongruous as an analytical matter to divorce the FARC's negotiated political settlement from FARC smuggling routes and physical sanctuaries, many of which have been located on Venezuelan soil. While the FARC might be classified as a narcotics trafficking organization, it might more usefully be considered to be in the toll-road business, or more inclusively in the wholesale extortion business. In that light, we see that although the FARC may be relocating and disbanding some troop units in accordance with the new power-sharing agreement, the FARC leadership seems to be giving up few smuggling routes, control of which constitutes a central column of their fiscal health and continued impunity. While some observers have complained about impunity of the FARC leaders in that they will apparently suffer very little punishment for crimes committed, less comment has

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focused on the impunity to be enjoyed by the FARC leaders as they continue with illicit trade into the future.⁶

An argument developed above -- that it is unhelpful from a military or strategic purpose to analyze Colombia's war as an internal affair, applies as well for Venezuela's conflict. Too many of the lines of communication, too much of the relevant leadership, and too many elements of coercive control are extra-Venezuelan. Neither a change in the current geopolitical azimuth and alignments of Venezuela's government, nor change in the country's socio-economic performance are to be found or developed within the borders of Venezuela alone. This paper talks of a Circum-Caribbean War because the various country-scale geographic identities cannot be reasonably isolated as geographic spaces for geopolitical or military analysis.

Late in 2013, an anti-government resistance movement in Venezuela began expressing itself with noticeably increased physical vigor, with hundreds of thousands of protesters taking to the streets.⁷ For some time previously, US analysts had typically commented on what they saw as the challenge of Venezuela's exporting revolution to its neighbors.⁸ That idea seemed to be turned inside out. Venezuela's Marxist administration found itself under siege politically. According to some regional analysts, the Bolivarian government would likely be changed-out by one means or another, and other than by routinely scheduled popular election.⁹ Indeed, legislative elections held in 2015 were overwhelmingly won by opposition candidates, but legislative control soon proved insufficient to effectively challenge the administration. Beyond the problem of opposition disunity was the question of whether the Bolivarians could or would deliver what its opponents sought.¹⁰ The increasingly apparent answer to that question was no. In fact, in October, 2016, the Bolivarian government determined as a matter of law that the legislature should no longer have any authority

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as to the national budget, that the process of collecting signatures for a possible revocation vote was suspended, and that, in fact, all electoral processes were suspended.¹¹ The ministry of defense even warned that it might simply take over the legislature, arguing the latter's threat to constitutionality.¹² The legislature was effectively excluded from government and became little more than a sounding board. In late March 2017, the Bolivarian high court asserted that, as the actions of the legislature were invalid, the court would assume all legislative powers.¹³

Although in late 2016 there remained international voices calling for dialog between the Maduro dictatorship and whatever amounted to an organized opposition, there existed no set of concessions likely to address the root causes of grievance short of the Venezuelan government's ejecting all its Cuban advisors and resigning *en masse*. Given that Nicolás Maduro is himself a creature of the Cuban communist party, the possibility of such an event is nil. The root-cause grievance was never a lack of toilet paper, galloping inflation, or collapsing medical care, although these kinds of things may have helped spur the time line.¹⁴ The pivotal grievance was the politically influential presence of Cubans and, moreover, the fact of Bolivarian Socialism itself.¹⁵ In other words, by late 2016, the notion of peaceful political compromise had lost its relevance. In late March 2017, the possibility of peacefully removing the regime appeared to have disappeared, but that does not mean there was necessarily to be an armed insurrection, revolt, insurgency, civil war, or something of the same ilk. The label may not matter, and in any case may depend as much as anything on the levels and types of international involvements. The power of the populace inside Venezuela to themselves effect positive political change appears to no longer exist.

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The basic geography: The Santa Marta area on the north Colombian coast, is, on a hemispheric-scale map, at the spatial epicenter of the greater regional conflict. The area serves as a suitably emblematic slice of terrain, a representative ecosystem of the larger conflict. There, the twin peaks of Christopher Columbus and Simon Bolivar rise to over 18, 700 feet within less than thirty miles of the Caribbean coast. Nearby is the county (*municipio*) of Aracataca, birthplace of and inspiration for deceased Nobel author and friend of Fidel Castro, Gabriel García Márquez.¹⁶ Close by to the northwest of the mountains are the lowland banana plantations and Ciénaga Grande, scene of a 1928 labor massacre that has become an iconic event for the activist left. Not far to the north is the city of Santa Marta. To the southeast, on the other side of the mountains is the Cesar River valley. Up that valley runs a major rail line that carries coal to the northern coast. To the northeast is the smuggling center of Maicao, near the Venezuelan border. Mountains, desert, jungles, plantations, rivers, extracted resource movement, illicit cultivation, smuggling culture, public lands, an international boundary, sea, city, and political iconography -- all in close proximity. In addition, there are few international borders in the world that can boast a greater differential in the going retail prices for a basic commodity like gasoline.¹⁷ It is not as though one cannot find something to fight over. The geography that the Santa Marta area typifies is highly favorable to smugglers and guerrillas -- for profitability, escape and narrative. It is beautiful terrain, both to the eye and for irregular warfare.

The Colombian 'Catatumbo', an informal area in the Department of Norte de Santander along the Venezuelan border to the southeast of the Cesar valley, shares with the Santa Marta area a similar mix of conflict geography, minus the city and sea. Perhaps not as representative of the Circum-Caribbean as a whole, the Catatumbo had by 2016 become the geographic heart of the

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struggle on the continent.¹⁸ There, much of the farm labor population itself became an object of contention, as many commercial crops -- coca not the least -- require relatively intense manual labor input. In addition to its suitability for coca cultivation, and its nearness to the international border, the Catatumbo is a locus of hydrocarbon extraction, which in turn brings royalties from the national to local governments. These royalties also become an object of predation. As one Colombian scholar said of a nearby region:

Disputes by local and departmental administrations and other types of conflicts are also written into the struggle for the control for local political power that carries with it power over the regional economy and thus over the resources derived from petroleum royalties.¹⁹

Revealingly, the people of Norte de Santander, having had first-hand experience with the Bolivarians' 'all means of struggle,' voted against the FARC accords.

The ledger of competitor identities

Bolivarians. The text herein refers to the governments of Cuba and Venezuela, their supporting institutions, symbols, programs, most of their allies, and etcetera as *Bolivarian*. Historical roots of the Bolivarian revolutionary movement in Venezuela trace back at least to efforts by Venezuelan leftists in the late 1980s to establish a revolutionary government there. The same roots lead back further to Fidel Castro's export and support to Marxist-Leninist styled insurgency throughout much of the region. The late Hugo Chávez is the historically prominent Bolivarian figure within more recent history.²⁰ 'Bolivarian' is the formal self-designation of the current dictating regime in Venezuela, which also often uses the terms 'Bolivarian Socialism' or 'Bolivarian Socialism of the XXI Century'. Today, the Bolivarian signature or brand is regional-

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transnational, with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) being the Bolivarian movement's best known and perhaps still the most potentially effective armed element. The FARC may become relatively less powerful within the movement (militarily) as it downsizes, re-flags or redistributes units in the context of the 'agreement for the termination of the conflict.'²¹ Cuba's national intelligence service (MININT) is probably the second most dangerous armed organization active within the movement, and can perhaps be considered the most dangerous in the context of strategic geographical reach for some limited applications. Venezuela's formal, uniformed military is the strongest hierarchically autonomous Bolivarian armed force. There exists a loosely organized network of Bolivarian gang-militias within Venezuela, and to a lesser extent within Colombia which also wield coercive power. Many of these are to a limited degree controlled by the aforementioned MININT, others by the Venezuelan military.

Several other national governments (notably Ecuador and Nicaragua within the region) openly assert affiliation with Bolivarian socialism, with the recent election of Lenín Moreno in Ecuador perhaps presaging a shift of the geographic center of Bolivarian political coordination toward that country. The formal armed forces of those countries, and their intelligence services (and perhaps remnants within, or rogue elements from the services of southern cone governments), are therefore to some degree available as coercive instruments within the Bolivarian movement. The extent to which this collaboration exists or is of any practical weight is highly dependent situationally. Depending on how the internal situation in Venezuela unfolds in 2017, the Venezuelan armed forces could emerge as the dominant coercive force within the Bolivarian collective, but such internal scoring must be leavened by uncertainty regarding the personal fortunes, cooperativeness or competition among the Venezuelan military leaders, as well as the

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tenuous condition of the Venezuelan economy and the vulnerabilities of illicit income flows. Cuban leadership changes (especially as they relate to the power of the MININT), and success of the FARC in the context of the FARC-Cuba-Colombian government negotiation effort, will also influence the relative influence internally of Bolivarian leaders.

The Bolivarian movement coheres (as a matter of ideology, labeling and messaging) numerous leftist political parties, guerrilla groups, non-governmental organizations, parts of international organizations and several national governments. The Forum of Sao Paulo (FSP) serves as a coordinating umbrella and mutual assistance body for regional leftist organizations that identify themselves as Bolivarian, as well as a number of organizations that do not self-brand as Bolivarian, but are nevertheless ideologically and geopolitically aligned.²² We can reasonably hypothesize that the most influential leaders of the Bolivarian movement can be found within the nucleus of the FSP. The strength of that influence, however, derives as much from other, simultaneous identities held by that same set of personalities. Exemplary are the Castro brothers of Cuba and the senior leaders of Brazil's Workers Party. For instance, the two founding personalities of the FSP were former Brazilian President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva and the recently deceased Fidel Castro. In other words, the Bolivarian movement has derived strength from the condition in which the senior motivators are, simultaneously, top communist and worker party bosses, chief executives of influential countries and the founders and leaders of the movement organizations. The ideological direction of the whole is unabashedly Marxist-Leninist and anti-American. Notably in the past two years, the grip that member parties of Forum of Sao Paulo amalgam has had on national governments seems to have slipped somewhat. President Dilma Rousseff, a Lula da Silva acolyte who followed him as president, was impeached and successfully

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removed from office through constitutional processes on the basis of corruption charges, charges that indicted Lula da Silva as well.²³ Age is also taking its toll, Fidel Castro died in late 2016, and 85 year-old brother Raul is planning retirement in 2018.

If ever ‘follow the money’ were good investigatory advice, it appears true for whoever might try to knit together an order of battle for the disparate and variously tenuous and well-bound network of actors within the Bolivarian movement and the broader network of Forum of Sao Paulo member entities. In the last year or so, a vast financial scandal came became public, exposing many of the more prominent and better organized chunks in the Bolivarian stew. The multi-billion dollar international kickback racket is referenced in the press using the shorthand “Odebrecht,” after the name of the construction conglomerate at its heart.²⁴ The tentacles of the corruption scheme reached in all directions, but its organizational energy and protection, if not its intellectual authorship, evidently traces back to the two top leaders of Brazil’s left, Lula da Silva and Dilma Rouseff. Moreover, the major illicit money streams flowed to the network of political parties that are members of the Forum of Sao Paulo. The Forum, established in the early 1990s to find ways to move forward after the collapse of the Soviet Union, mounted electoral efforts that succeeded in taking the reins of many governments at the national, departmental and local levels throughout Latin America. The Forum’s ‘ways to move forward’ prominently featured parasitic attachment to government contracts and programs, black market trade, especially of illegal drugs, and perhaps the direct transfer of government monies.²⁵ When two of the region’s largest economies, Brazil and Argentina, began to tank (and the region’s ideological pendulum began to move away from the left) the leftist grip on the reins of government in those countries loosened and transnational corruption schemes came increasingly to light. Arguably, the Marxist-Leninist parties affiliated

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with the Forum of Sao Paulo have enjoyed far more material and political success after the fall of the Soviet Union than they had before the fall. Ironically perhaps, Russia may have had more fortune selling weapons and moving spies in the region after the collapse of its own Marxist-Leninist system, but as a result of the autochthonous success of the Marxist-Leninist parties of the Forum. In any case, the Bolivarian movement (tied to the Forum of Sao Paulo through several member organizations, overlapping directorates, and enthusiastic public solidarity) was in all likelihood a major beneficiary of the proceeds of the parasitic operation of the Odebrecht racket.

Additionally, an influential array of out-of-region national governments, international organizations and NGO's have tended through their policies to enable the FARC or its smaller Bolivarian brother, the National Liberation Army (ELN) to the disadvantage of the Colombian military and Colombian society.²⁶

Grenadines. As a convenient shorthand, governments and other entities in opposition to the Bolivarian enterprise are referred to herein as *Grenadine*. The term is not used by any extant organizations, but is adopted here in allusion to the historical period when the region of northern South America was known as *Nueva Granada*.²⁷ Outwardly, it is now less common than it was only a few years ago for countries in the hemisphere to align with the Venezuelan Bolivarian regime, its economic and human rights performance having become an embarrassment. Hardly any governments have expressly stated their opposition to the Bolivarian movement, however. The recently elected President of Argentina, Mauricio Macri, is one exception. President Macri quickly put Argentinean foreign and economic policy on an anticipated anti-Bolivarian pathway.²⁸

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This was a major development for at least two reasons. Argentina has traditionally exerted outsized intellectual and political influence -- beyond, say, its relative population size and its non-strategic geographic location. Also, the Macri administration's policies are expected to defund Bolivarian state and transnational organs.²⁹ Although the Argentinians changed out their government administration for one that is anti-Bolivarian it does not mean that government has openly identified itself in active opposition to the Bolivarians such that we could put that government on the Grenadine side of the ledger, at least not yet. Still, of all the single elements of national government power that would clearly mark the geopolitical pendulum swing away from the Bolivarians, the change in Argentina's national executive is perhaps the most prominent. While the overall economic strength of most of the countries led by FSP member parties has been in decline for the past several years, the financial health of the leaders of its member parties, has increased handsomely.³⁰ This flow of money to Bolivarian and FSP leaders is put in some jeopardy by the sea change in Argentina's government. The public and juridical exposure of the 'Odebrecht' scandal mentioned earlier is emblematic of this change.

In Brazil, Vice-President Michel Temer assumed the powers of the presidency as a result of the impeachment and trial proceedings against Dilma Rousseff. Michel Temer is a long-established leader within the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), which has not had much of any international ideological affiliation. It is too early to say what or how rapidly the changes in executive control in Brazil and Argentina will affect the militaries and intelligence apparatuses of those two countries. Near-term changes in the intelligence services are more likely than in the militaries-proper, and Argentina's president, who won in an open election, is more likely achieve institutional changes than is Temer in Brazil. In any case, it appears that personnel

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changes in the security institutions of the two countries are more likely to favor the prospects of the Grenadines than those of the Bolivarians.³¹

While Peru has exerted less influence generally on the Grenadine-Bolivarian conflict, President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (elected in June 2016) has been an outspoken critic of Venezuela's Bolivarian leadership and economic policies, whereas his predecessor, Ollanta Humala, had been a consistent if relatively tacit supporter of the hemisphere's Bolivarian socialist movement. On the other hand, Ecuadoran elections in April, 2017 retained Bolivarian leadership there. It might reasonably be said that in Peru and Ecuador, as elsewhere on the continent, Venezuela's collapse has had a negative overall effect on Bolivarian prospects. In spite of the Ecuadoran result, it may be that the most effective opposition to Bolivarian socialism has been recognition of government failures through democratic electoral mechanisms

From 2002-2010, Colombia's executive administration and armed forces, under the leadership of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, actively opposed the Bolivarian movement and the FSP project. That began to change after the 2010 election of Juan Manuel Santos, slowly at first, then by an accelerated shift to accommodate and then cooperate with the Bolivarian project. Colombian President Santos' efforts to consummate a negotiated settlement of some kind with the leaders of the FARC came with softened positions toward the Cuban and Venezuelan governments.³² The FARC's prowess at the negotiation table took over center stage of the Bolivarian-Grenadine irregular war, displacing battle actions within Colombia. For the regime of Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, this served as at least a minor distractor from Venezuela's precipitous social and economic collapse. The negotiating behavior of the Colombian administration complicated the ledger of opponents and goals in the overall Grenadine-Bolivarian

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contest as many had perceived it. Whereas Colombia's government and armed forces had been squarely opposed to the Bolivarian movement, that opposition had been put in doubt, evidently leaving the Grenadines without a national government champion. The Colombian plebiscite of October 2, 2016 became a pivotal clarifying event in this regard, as will be discussed.³³

The Colombian government. The Colombians completed a presidential election cycle on June 15, 2014, reelecting President Juan Manuel Santos. As predicted, his victory accelerated negotiations with the FARC, which had been going on since at least late 2012.³⁴ Juan Manuel Santos' presidential victory had a downstream effect on the progress and outcome of the Bolivarian-Grenadine irregular war by favoring the continued survival of the Bolivarian regime in Venezuela and lending increased legitimacy to the Cuban Castro regime. The Cuban government (hosting the FARC negotiations), the FARC, and the Venezuelan regime are all Bolivarian socialists of common dedication. It had become Colombian government policy under Manuel Santos to remain subtle at the diplomatic level regarding the upheaval in Venezuela, evidently in order to give the negotiations with the FARC the greatest amount of oxygen, that is, to avoid having outsiders conflate the increasingly intolerable behavior of the Venezuelan Bolivarian leadership with the equally Bolivarian leadership of the FARC. President Santos chose patient rhetoric regarding the Venezuela situation, with occasional displays of disappointment with the Maduro regime. The Santos policy toward the Venezuela situation and government has been met with harsh criticism from some informed Colombians.³⁵ By some measures it appears that President Santos had become as unpopular with the Colombian public as Nicolás Maduro was among the Venezuelan population.³⁶ It is hard to say what the balance of cause and effects is -- if

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the unpopularity of the accords has lowered Santos' popularity or if Santos popularity has weakened that of the accords, but the spiral has been downward.³⁷ In the past two years, the Santos administration's progressively more generous concessions to the FARC appeared unrequited, at least to much of the Colombian electorate. Furthermore, the Santos government seems to be turning a blind eye to or even encouraging the organizational energy of the Forum of Sao Paulo within Colombia.³⁸ The broad public negativity toward these two leaders (Maduro and Santos) appears directly related to the perception that the two share a tendency -- service to some aspect of aggressive Bolivarian socialism. It seems that strong majorities among the populations of both Venezuela and Colombia see presidents Maduro, Castro and Santos as of a piece, working on behalf of the same side in the Bolivarian-Grenadine irregular war.

The Colombian Armed Forces. Our listing here of the Colombian military separately from the Colombian government exaggerates the idea that Colombian military leaders would make choices independently of the Colombian government's elected civilian leadership. This is not the case. However, the Colombian military has traditionally, and for the most part within the confines of the constitution, maintained a measure of ideological and political independence, and has strongly influenced the decision making of elected leaders. It has historically been anti-communist, and so, in general, Colombia's military membership is more easily motivated to oppose the FARC and its Bolivarian allies in combat than it is to support an agreement with the FARC, especially if the latter entails some set of concessions regarding control over rural land.³⁹ Furthermore, the power-sharing accords may have created an entirely new penal jurisdiction -- a new form of court -- to be controlled to a great degree by Bolivarians, which might be empowered to indict military members

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on allegations of past violations of humanitarian law.⁴⁰ Given that the Colombian Armed Forces is one of the most popular institutions in the country, it was to be expected that the opinions of the members of that institution would have a ripple effect on the broader electorate. This feature of the proposed accords was among those most directly and specifically contested by its opponents and leaders of the NO vote in the November 2016 plebiscite on the accords.⁴¹

In terms of combat capacity, Colombia's military has been one of the three or four most effective in the hemisphere. Perhaps only the United States Army can boast more experienced combat leaders. As a result of that extensive combat experience, however, Colombia's military leaders understand the dramatic effect that their country's diverse physical and human geography (in terms of risk-distances and scale) has on military power. Colombia's military leaders understand that the FARC's and ELN's cross-border sanctuaries in Venezuela and Ecuador are, barring an extraordinary change of circumstances, normally beyond their culminating point, that is, too far away (in turns of all forms of cost) to prudently reach with direct military action.⁴² On the other hand, it is to be assumed that Colombian military personnel have maintained considerable contact with members, retired and active, pre-Chávez and post-Chávez, within the Venezuelan armed forces. These two national armed forces can hardly be considered natural enemies. Considering the hundreds of thousands of intermixed Colombian-Venezuelan families, businesses and professional experiences, affinities generally outweigh animosities. On the other hand, a process of Bolivarianizing the Venezuelan military leadership has likely differentiated the two armies more than in the past. Additionally, the Colombian military may have to react to distinct and differentiating facts on the ground. Those reactions will influence if not force decisions from

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Colombian civilian political leadership. For instance, if a flow of Venezuelan refugees were to accelerate in the context of an even more precipitous social and economic decline, Colombian unit commanders would (this writer's opinion) probably feel themselves obliged to protect those flows, rather than stop them.

The FARC. In the first months of 2016, FARC leaders may have been gaining influence among some international elites, while losing it among the general populations in northern South America. As a result of the internal stress in Venezuela and as reflected in the October 2, 2016 plebiscite in Colombia, the public value of the FARC brand may have been further expiring just as the organization was formally downsizing in the course of the implementation of the FARC-government agreement. The FARC leaders' negotiations with the Santos administration have been going on since at least 2012.⁴³ Over time, FARC and other Bolivarian leaders had apparently convinced themselves that the Colombian population, or at least enough of the Colombian electorate, would support the accords in a plebiscite. All elements of the Bolivarian community - Cuba's government, all of the pro-Bolivarian governments of the hemisphere, and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, the Bolivarian regional organization built to displace the OAS) were ebullient regarding the accords. The FARC leader, incredulous after the negative vote, offered,

We moved in such a positive a context for the construction of peace, surrounded by the whole International community, building face-to-face reconciliation with the victims, that it seemed to us impossible that the citizens would contemplate the option of rejecting what we had been constructing.⁴⁴

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They were mistakenly optimistic; the accords were voted down.⁴⁵ We can safely suppose the Bolivarians' public failure depressed morale among junior and mid-grade ranks of the FARC, which had been promised a long list of benefits under the terms of the accords (not to mention not having to go back into combat). Fortunately for their aspirations, Colombian President Santos simply disregarded the result of the plebiscite, made a few cosmetic changes and within two week had the Colombian congress ratify the deal, which his administration and the FARC moved quickly to begin implementation. Defiance by President Santos of the public mood and expressed preference has left a bitter public residue. Meanwhile, the FARC continues to be in control of its own supposed dismantling.⁴⁶

FARC leaders' strategic emphasis on logistics is arguably what has made the FARC the most formidable of all Latin American insurgent armies. The FARC's military capacity has rested on logistic and financial structures. FARC's sustainability as an armed force has always been a function of well-secured escape and logistics routes. Escape routes have to lead to somewhere, however, and that somewhere has been a set of physical sanctuaries from Colombian coercive power and authority. Innumerable analyses purport to explain why Colombia's 'internal' war has lasted for decades. Of all the available explanations, the one that this observer finds most plausible and weighty highlights the ability of the FARC to maintain physical sanctuaries (first in remote areas within Colombia, and in later decades in neighboring countries) and reach them. Put another way, the Colombian military has not been entirely able to successfully pursue FARC leaders and close those sanctuaries. The existence of guerrilla sanctuaries across Colombia's international borders, and especially inside Venezuela, is the columnar reason why the Colombian war persisted.

To the military maintenance of secure escape routes and sanctuaries add infiltration of pro-FARC elements into various Colombian government agencies and institutions, the considerable financial power that the FARC derives from the illegal drug trade and other predation, and international political and diplomatic support. Nevertheless, without physical sanctuary for FARC leaders, (sanctuary made available in good measure as a result of these other factors), the other factors would not be enough to keep the FARC alive. In other words, while overall FARC strength is variously derived and variously dependent, the FARC would not exist as a viable force capable of significant offensive action but for the maintenance of physical sanctuaries. If the leftist government of Venezuela were under increasing internal pressure and the outcome of that pressure were to turn sharply against the Bolivarians such as to turn them out of power, FARC sanctuaries inside Venezuela would become increasingly tenuous. FARC senior leaders would be obliged to escape to more distant, less accommodating lands. This possibility of more successful military and police pursuit against FARC elements (entailing the reduction of FARC sanctuaries) has been obviated by the concessionary posture of the Colombian administration during the negotiations. Today, the question of where the FARC is keeping its financial accounts has arisen in the context of the negotiations. For years, the FARC has been considered stout financially, its wealth one of the reasons to take its threats seriously. A number of reports and studies over the years have examined the illicit and licit industries operated by the FARC and determined that it was on the basis of competent financial management of a large war chest that it was able to maintain units in the field.⁴⁷ Curiously, when transparency regarding FARC financial accounts recently became a lead public issue, Colombian President Santos declared as fact that his government had no idea where or even if the FARC actually had any substantial amount of liquid wealth. No FARC

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treasure trove. The convenience of that dubious assertion was received by opponents of the accords as clumsily disingenuous.⁴⁸ A Colombian chief executive asserting that the FARC has no hidden wealth generated a new syllogistic confusion. If the FARC is rich, where is the money? If it is not, why is the FARC considered so dangerous that billions of dollars' worth of concessions are being made to it? It is not illogical that the safeguarding of insider control of billions of banked dollars might be a central objective of the negotiations -- on both sides of the table.

The FARC leaders have presided over a criminal enterprise that has planted hundreds of thousands of land mines, kidnapped thousands of citizens, murdered hundreds, destroyed vast areas of pristine ecology, sabotaged billions of dollars of infrastructure, and accumulated vast wealth on the basis of the cocaine trade, cattle rustling, and a full gamut of other predatory methods.⁴⁹ The FARC built political strength by combining a small amount of ideological justification with a practical capacity for the immane. The Bolivarian vocational habit of inflicting strategic pain through destruction of economic infrastructure continued throughout the negating process and seems to be continuing.⁵⁰

The ELN. In late October, 2016 and in spite of the plebiscite vote rejecting the FARC accords, leaders of the smaller ELN and the Colombian president announced the beginnings of a new round of negotiations for a set of accords of their own.⁵¹ The ELN leaders are as implicated in multiple criminal actions as are the FARC leaders. The prospects for the Colombian government of a long process of talks with them is complicated by a number of factors going beyond the ELN's rap sheet, however, although it seems President Santos will likely do what he can to avoid any public

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ratification steps in the process.⁵² Additionally, the FARC seems to have a great deal of control over the ELN efforts at such diplomacy (or perhaps the control is from a common denominator such as Cuban influence), and so the structure of ELN motivations is unclear.⁵³ The ELN may be useful to the overall Bolivarian enterprise as a release valve for un-demobilizable FARC guerrilla warriors in need of an army to join if the FARC indeed dissipates. The ELN might also be little more than a military assignment transfer destination within the larger Bolivarian enterprise. In any case, having the ELN remain at large could offer a significant Bolivarian advantage along a border where smuggling routes are contested by various criminal organizations.

The Bolivarian Government of Venezuela. The Venezuelan, as the Cuban regime, fits comfortably into the same Bolivarian basket for purposes of analysis. We can reasonably suppose that in terms of decision-making the two regimes are in near lockstep or even that the Venezuelan government apparatus is effectively subordinate to that of the Cubans. This assumption might be somewhat of an error in view of the choices potentially available to some Venezuelan government officials in comparison to Cuban officials of similar rank. Less committed Venezuelan Bolivarians might encounter the relatively attractive option (especially if they cannot emigrate) of expressing contrition, collaborating, and making amends with an opposition group if such a group were to appear on the verge of successfully ousting the Bolivarians from power. If the liberal, free-market, pro-United States current within the Venezuelan opposition were to emerge from the chaos in a dominant position, some Venezuelan Bolivarians might successfully change flags, tell where the money is buried and survive peaceably within Venezuela. However, in mid-2017, it seems just as

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likely that the formal armed forces will dominate any resistance and will remain Bolivarian unless a major, external effort is mounted against it.

Notably, the Venezuelan government enthusiastically supported the positions and goals of the FARC leaders in their negotiations with the Colombian government. The Venezuelan government explicitly supported the idea that the Colombian government grant amnesty to the FARC's leaders for any acts committed in the course of their struggle. Simultaneously, the Venezuelan government jailed its opposition's leaders for mundane infractions, refusing to grant amnesties, a moral inconsistency that did not go unnoted.⁵⁴

The Bolivarian Government of Venezuela, like the FARC is one of the largest illegal drug trafficking organizations in the world.⁵⁵ While hierarchically distinct, the two collaborate closely and depend on one-another in the business.⁵⁶ Destruction of these two organizations would necessarily deal a massive blow to global illegal trafficking.

The Venezuelan armed forces. Top Venezuelan flag officers might represent a line of Bolivarian affiliation that is a bit more nationalistic than the leaders of United Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV. They might also be uninclined to suffer leadership from that party structure, and probably also resist excessive control from the Cuban party.⁵⁷ They will likely maintain Venezuela's international alignment with Cuba, however, including the tendency to try to honor financial debts with China and Russia. They will probably continue to allow FARC and FARC-associate sanctuaries inside Venezuelan territory as well.

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On 29 April, 2014, an active duty captain in the National Guard, Juan Carlos Cagüaripano Scott, made an articulate, unequivocal expression of opposition to the Bolivarian government.⁵⁸ It seemed at that time perhaps a pivotal public call to mutiny within the Venezuelan Armed Forces. The captain's communique came after the government had announced earlier in the month that some thirty military officers had been arrested.⁵⁹ It seemed that a sizeable portion of the Bolivarian Armed Forces, while unlikely to conduct a coup d'état recognizable as such, might refuse to participate in administering the level of repression necessary to keep the current government in power.⁶⁰ However, earlier in April 2014, before the mass arrest, a senior Bolivarian general had assured that the military would act to retain President Maduro in power.⁶¹ The general made the suggestion that there might be ten, twenty, or even thirty mutinous officers, but that it was a trivial number. His shrug, which in hindsight appears to have been a gesture to prepare the public for the subsequent arrests, could not help but come across as an admission that severe cracks had been forming in the unity of the armed forces. By late-2016 it appeared that Bolivarian control of the formal Venezuelan military apparatuses was effectively consolidated, the mutiny suppressed. We have not heard more from Captain Cagüaripano.

On the other hand, while remaining in the Bolivarian sphere, the top military leaders may have in fact already conducted what amounts to an internal coup. The military has assumed autonomous control of a large slice of the Venezuelan hydrocarbons industry.⁶² Soon after, the Ministry of Defense was given broad powers to oversee economic matters, starting with agricultural and food production.⁶³ The government also announced new international purchases of weaponry for the armed forces, Maduro justifying "a military all the time increasing in power...all the time increasing in size."⁶⁴ It is as yet unclear what this means in terms of internal

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institutional power balance among the various parts of Venezuela's control regime, but as of early 2017 the military's portfolio of authority, and perhaps its autonomy, seemed to be on the increase, and without apparent ideological change.⁶⁵ It might foretell an increase in leverage in opposition to Cuban influence, but if so, this has not yet become publicly visible.

Although senior officers appear to be committed Bolivarians, some signs seem to indicate disaffection among the lower ranks.⁶⁶ It is still possible, if an even more precipitous social collapse were to ensue, that some portion of the Venezuelan Armed Forces might mutiny and perhaps even withdraw to Colombia. If welcomed in Colombia, they perhaps could then reform into some sort of Venezuelan armed force in exile and perhaps contribute in some way to steering the outcome of Venezuelan unrest. The option of forming joint Grenadine units might be compelled morally by the plight into which the Venezuelan population plunges. In this observer's estimation, however, much if not most of the elements of the Bolivarian military will remain in place and loyal, if not to Maduro and his party faction, at least to the current pro-Bolivarian generals. It may result that the Venezuelan military still has within it a significant mass of leaders who are disaffected with the Bolivarian movement and who are in some manner sympathetic to liberal governing tendencies; therefore analysts should not discard the attractiveness of mutiny within some units.⁶⁷ Also, it is not clear at this time that the current Colombian government would welcome defecting Venezuelan soldiers with asylum, or would contrarily extradite them back to Venezuela in support of the Bolivarians with whom the current Colombian administration seems to have made common bond. How to treat defecting Venezuelan soldiers might be a key issue that could inflame relationships between some Colombian military leaders and the Colombian administration.

Venezuela's Bolivarian military has received modern armaments from abroad, especially from Russia, and will maintain a capability to challenge and harm interventionist elements, although armed confrontations are likely to break out sooner among and against what we would hardly recognize as invasion columns.⁶⁸ Nation-scale analyses are not best-suited to explain the probable compositions of contestants. Various border crossing points between Venezuela and Colombia may become workable geographic referents for firefights, perhaps among hybridized forces and mixes of paramilitary, insurgent and criminal groups.⁶⁹ These armed groups will feature varying degrees of national sentiment and identity, along with what may be more immediately motivating criminal identities. Violent contacts could easily occur in relation to the movement of contraband items, refugees, defectors, or to stop the infiltration of guerrilla units into one country or the other. Just as with the drug trade and long guerrilla war inside Colombia, armed conflict between and through Colombian and Venezuelan territory will center on control of smuggling routes.

The Venezuelan Opposition. Interesting comparisons can be made between the Bolivarian anti-government business model in Colombia (featuring strategic extortion applied by semi-formal armed units) and the movement currently opposed to the Bolivarian government of Venezuela. In Venezuela, the opposition has been motivated against the Bolivarian government's economic incompetence and corruption, as well as by quotidian political ambitions within the opposition.⁷⁰ The opposition method in Venezuela generally has been non-violent action, although the use of mortal force may increase. Attacks against Venezuela's economic infrastructure have been highly uncommon. A strategic threat to the overall economy in Venezuela might be delivered

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in the form of massive work strikes, but the economy is already in seeming freefall, with the regime and party being among the last groups in the society likely to suffer.

When one compares the demographic scale of the Colombian leftist insurgency (represented by the FARC and ELN) to the opposition movement in Venezuela, the numbers speak loudly. For instance, the FARC has perhaps 7,000 active armed members out of a total Colombian population that now exceeds 46 million (the ELN is perhaps a third the size of the FARC). If we are generous in our math, and we were to suppose that Colombia's leftist guerrillas either control or enjoy the willing support of 400,000 Colombians (a number that far exceeds anyone's count, including that by the FARC) it would not amount to one percent of the Colombian population. Nevertheless, that seemingly small number has been sufficient (within the mix of other factors) to net the FARC's top leaders significant political power-sharing, a grant of impunity, revenge against their enemies, and effective ownership of rural lands complete with share-croppers and control of smuggling routes. In Venezuela, by comparison, active opposition to the government reaches into the millions of persons, enough that it elected a dominating majority of opposition representatives to the national legislature in December 2015.⁷¹ Popular opposition to the Maduro government is not at one or two percent of the population, but is instead a clear majority. It seems from this comparison that a huge *unarmed* majority can wield far less political leverage than a miniscule but ruthless and well-armed minority. Such a lesson, broadly applied, does not bode well for the future political health of the Continent.

In 2013 and 2014 energy within the Venezuelan opposition came from the student population. Campuses in Latin America have always been places of government leniency and free

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speech. They have been sanctuaries wherein people can meet and conspire. That the wave of student conspiratorial conversation should expand against a socialist government presented a conundrum for the far left, to be sure. In the case of Venezuela, the danger to the government posed by the student uprising was doubled by the fact that so many parents of the riot-prone students supported their behavior. The danger was then redoubled by having so many relatives with financial means living in exile. The Venezuelan exile population, the majority of which are in Colombia, the United States and Spain, do not wish to suffer the never-to-return fate of the Cuban Diaspora. Venezuelan exiles were intensely aware and supportive of the student families. Add to this body of opposition an array of former personnel from the pre-Chávez security institutions who were purged by the Bolivarian government. Living in exile in various countries of the region, not so much time has passed that these latter personnel have lost their contact networks or organizational skills. In short, the Venezuelan opposition in exile is growing in financial power, has a deep bench of human resources on which to draw, and may be growing in resolve. While it does not have the huge disposable income that control of the oil flow gives to the Bolivarians, the opposition can trade on the prospects of future control of that same resource. Opposition activists could enjoy some sanctuary within Venezuelan borders in the bosom of family homes, outside Venezuela among Colombian and Colombian-Venezuelan families, and beyond the region among the tens of thousands of Venezuelan exiles.

However, the government seems to have successfully repressed the student opposition in the past two years, the universities are underfunded and shrinking. Many students who have had the option of leaving have left. In May of 2016, the Maduro government declared a state of emergency that, among other things, stripped the opposition National Assembly of what official powers it

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had.⁷² The move seemed to narrow options for peaceful resistance.⁷³ The effect of these factors on the strength of civil resistance inside Venezuela is yet to be seen, but it may be a factor influencing opposition energy in neighboring Colombia.

The Cuban government. The Cuban government is likely complicit in criminal activities of the FARC, the ELN (and perhaps several affiliated illicit drug organizations) and the Venezuelan regime.⁷⁴ It is reasonable to consider four entities: the FARC, the ELN, the Bolivarian regime in Venezuela and the Castro regime in Cuba as variably self-interested identities within the same enterprise. It is likewise reasonable to include an assortment of criminal and militia or paramilitary identities as lesser either business or movement associates of these four. No organized organizational entity, however, to include insiders of the Venezuelan Bolivarian regime, is as invested in the outcome of the Circum-Caribbean War as is the Cuban communist party vanguard, to include the leadership of the Cuban Communist Party but also the Cuban intelligence service, MININT. For these Cuban Bolivarians (whose enterprise is alternatively describable as Bolivarianism, castroism or just ‘the Revolution’) losing the war would greatly weaken their exercise of power on and off the island. The Cuban economy, thin in any case, would suffer dramatically if it were to lose control of Venezuelan oil subsidies.⁷⁵ Perhaps even more concerning to the Cuban Bolivarians is the probable loss of influence on the direction of the socialist movement in the hemisphere. To the extent the Bolivarians lose this war, the influence of Castroism in the hemisphere will likely fade, and just at the end of the lives of the Castros themselves. In their role as influencers off the island, the Cubans enjoy the weight of their revolutionary legacy, the advantages that a common regional language affords, and the leverage of a well-prepared clandestine apparatus. Cubans are nevertheless easily identifiable as such.

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Distance diminishes power, and although close to South America physically and culturally, the Cuban must nevertheless travel and is a foreigner in foreign lands. ‘Yankee Go Home’ is an aging cliché, whereas *Cubanos Fuera* is a reverberating new *grito*. The outcome of the Circum-Caribbean War for the Cubans depends in considerable measure on the outcome of internal unrest in Venezuela; the future of protests there is of existential importance to the Cuban communist party. The health of the Cuban Revolution also depends on the political and material advantages that the FARC can gain as a result of its negotiations with the government of Colombia. Via the FARC power negotiations, the Bolivarian enterprise has apparently secured affordable control of vast swaths of rural terrain that include principle cross-border and cross-continent smuggling routes.

On the other hand, if the Cuban leadership were to lose what control it has over Venezuela’s hydrocarbon resources in the aftermath of a precipitous social collapse, senior Cuban officials finding themselves physically present on the continent will easily be able to withdraw back to Cuba. The Cuban regime would in all likelihood offer asylum to some of the more senior Venezuelan officials as well, including members of the Venezuelan communist party. Lesser-ranking Cuban Bolivarians may take civil chaos as an opportunity to emigrate elsewhere to seek asylum, including to the United States. Nevertheless, from the probable perspective of current senior Bolivarian leaders throughout the movement, this is a war that must be won. For the institutions tied to the Revolution, the loss of Bolivarian control on the continent could mean personal financial and system-wide economic disaster.

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The Governments of China and Russia. In May 2016, the government of China agreed to a restructuring of Venezuela's debt, a move that apparently included an extension of payments at lower rates, and also an announced reduction in Venezuelan government funding for imports to Venezuela.⁷⁶ This seemed to indicate that the Chinese were redoubling their bet that the Bolivarians would remain in charge of Venezuelan assets, especially the hydrocarbons industry. The actions taken by the government of China with respect to Venezuelan debt are best considered in the context of hydrocarbon deliveries from Venezuela to Cuba, this because much of the overall scheme for Chinese resource capture is in the form of discount purchase from Cuba. At the same time the Chinese were restructuring its Venezuelan debt, it was publicly distancing themselves from statements of preference regarding the leadership fate of President Maduro himself.⁷⁷ The Chinese signal seemed clear enough -- that they supported Bolivarian control, but not necessarily under the Maduro hand. Since then, while Chinese direct investment seems to have slowed, the Chinese don't seem to have given up on Bolivarian Venezuela as a partner.⁷⁸ (This approach by the Chinese should, if nothing else, remind analysts to avoid treating 'Venezuela' as an independent actor-identity. The government of Venezuela is probably better seen as a salient organizational chunk in the Bolivarian stew, with the government of Cuba being a more influential chunk in most international and transnational matters.)

The Chinese government, together with large Chinese firms, have made commercial inroads in the Caribbean and northern South America in recent years. Distances, both physical and cultural, appear such that direct Chinese managerial or military presence is not likely to become a visible factor in the irregular war. However, because of the distribution of Chinese financial investments, and the general method of making those investments, major Chinese firms

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and the Chinese government are simultaneously attracted to Bolivarian socialist governments and positioned to lose a great deal depending on the war's outcome.⁷⁹ The Chinese have tended to seek relationships with senior government leadership, focusing on countries with advantageous combinations of ideological tendency and legacy, and needed resources.⁸⁰ Single party states present accelerated access and rapid payoff. Simply put, Chinese financial interests expanded more rapidly and on a greater scale in Venezuela than in other places, both because it is oil-rich and because a single party had taken control of the state.

The Chinese seem to have correctly calculated the risk of successful popular rebellion in Venezuela to be low. They apparently bet correctly that in spite of economic mismanagement, the Bolivarian administration would quash effective dissent, and that the Venezuelan military would underpin Bolivarian control of the country. Perhaps they invested in the hopes of facilitating these outcomes. In any case, they seem to have accepted the Cuban regime's assurances that the island's power transition upon the death and or retirement of both Castro brothers has been paved, and that there will not be a serious discontinuity. One might reasonably speculate that the Chinese government would aid in assuring that such outcomes do in fact occur: perhaps through financial or technical assistance to specific Cuban leadership slices; to the Cuban MININT, in the form of loans to whatever color of Bolivarian shores up the Venezuelan regime; as well perhaps in the form of diplomatic encouragement for the use of repressive measures against the opposition generally. Physical Chinese presence, however, is likely to be low key and low visibility.

The Russian government has ostensibly pegged its foreign policy practice in Latin America to influence through a network of regional international forums.⁸¹ A few of the targeted forums are of recent founding, set up by the Venezuelan government specifically to further Bolivarian interests,

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interests which prominently featured degrading US influence. As noted earlier, the Russians do a weapons business in the region. Recent sales to the Bolivarian Armed Forces argue the likelihood of established personal relations with Venezuelan military leaders. Given known Russian emphasis in furthering their government's worldwide influence in the hydrocarbon resource market, one can reasonably assume that the flailing hydrocarbon industry in Venezuela is a major attraction for Russian agents of various stripes. Economic and industrial management failures (and the intra-party stress it causes among the Venezuelan Bolivarians) could also present Russian agents the opportunity to offer Russian expertise to their proprietary Venezuelan associates, as a way of strengthening in-country influence.

The Government of Brazil. For several years until summer, 2016, the Brazilian federal administration shared ideological branding and heritage with the Latin American far left, that is, with the member components of the Forum of Sao Paulo, and therein with the Bolivarians. Recently removed President Dilma Rousseff, like her predecessor President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (who was a founder of the Forum of Sao Paulo along with Fidel Castro), openly support the progressive social and economic narrative of Cuban socialism. However, even these Brazilian leaders seemed to reject specific contraptions of Cuban and Venezuelan political influence. Brazilian foreign policy has often seemed more nationalistic and geostrategic than ideological, and was at no point swayed by the notion that Hugo Chávez or the Castro brothers were the natural leaders of South America's progressive bloc or movement. In other words, some tension has existed between the Brazilian and Cuban trunks of post-Soviet Marxist-Leninist (or *progresista*) affiliations in Latin America. The spirit of this fault line is easily suggested by binomial

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simplifications such as Castro-Lula da Silva, Spanish-Portuguese, or Cuba-Brazil. Generally stated, while the agenda, argumentation, philosophy and messaging of Bolivarianism is attractive and compatible with Brazilian progressivism, the Brazilian in Brazilian progressivism is not likely to accept any power hierarchy for the hemisphere that lends too much power to its Cuban expression at the expense of its Brazilian expression. Note, however, that the title of this essay asserts a 'Circum-Caribbean' geography for the irregular war. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was a co-founder of the FSP with Fidel Castro. Arguably, the initial geographic axis of the FSP was Havana-Brazilia. Reflecting this, Brazilian Workers Party leaders have had a leading influence in the ascendant course of the leftist parties throughout South America, probably equal to that of the Cuban leaders. However, this being the Bolivarians' war in Bolivarian space (in a physical and human geographic sense *northern* South America and the Caribbean), it is the Bolivarian part of the progressive movement that holds the key advantage of strategic distances. In ways, Brazil is farther geographically from the zone of armed conflict than is the United States.

The Brazilian military includes a large, capable infantry army that could shift the correlation of force in favor of either side were it to in some way intervene on the ground in Venezuela. By intervening, Brazil might not only visibly displace some United States influence in the region, it could grab away from Cuban leaders much of their influence as well, including as to the Venezuelan oil treasure. Such an adventure, if successful, could go a long way to fulfill a Brazilian national self-concept as a regional if not world power. Accepting such, Brazil nevertheless does not have the military logistic experience or infrastructure to give it great confidence in the success of an expeditionary force of sufficient size to deploy against much effective resistance. Although Brazil fills much of the map of the South American continent, a

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look at that map is enough to remind that ‘right-next-door’ to Venezuela and Colombia also means across an immense jungle-expanse.⁸² Military lines of communication could follow the Amazon River courses, but once Brazilian units deployed up out of the Amazon basin and into that of the Orinoco, the government of Brazil would have to strain to support them logistically.

At the time of this writing in mid-2017, the Brazilian economy is not performing especially well, making the prospective expenses of a foreign military adventure even less attractive. Furthermore, removal for corruption of Brazil’s pro-Bolivarian Dilma Rousseff decreased the value of the Bolivarian political brand domestically. In other words, since 2014, the slim likelihood of any muscular Brazilian participation on behalf of the Bolivarians in the Bolivarian-Grenadine irregular war has continually diminished and is now nearly gone. An international military foray in favor of the Bolivarians seems extremely improbable.

On the other hand, Brazil could still make a decision to intervene, perhaps as part of a regional multi-national armed humanitarian effort in the context of some compelling Venezuelan social collapse and suffering. Such a decision would be more likely taken if, as this author believes may occur, it comes to appear to enough world (or at least hemispheric) leaders that the future for Venezuela’s people under the current regime is utterly bleak and that nothing short of international intervention can save Venezuela from murderous anarchy. Brazil (again depending on a number of internal political outcomes) could then tip the balance, accelerate the arrival of a new stasis, and participate in the design of the follow-on political order in Venezuela. Without risking a potentially costly geopolitical confrontation with other governments, Brazil could help release the Venezuelan people from the yoke of incompetence, displace Cuban control of Venezuelan oil and simultaneously displace some of United States’ regional influence. If the Brazilians were to

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anticipate a long expensive slog, however, or see Venezuelan political control solidifying around the Bolivarian military high command, they will more likely stay at home. If they see an opportunity to exercise military presence, assert their nation as a competent military power and do so at a low risk of failure and high potential return, we might see the presence of Brazilian elements somewhere inside Venezuela, if only for a short period of time. This however, is probably less likely to happen to the extent the Brazilian government cannot repair damage done to its own legitimacy resulting from the Petrobras-Odebrecht scandals.

Brazilian leadership may conclude that if Grenadine elements were to wrest the government of Venezuela away from the Bolivarians, the economy of Venezuela would return to a healthier state, energy production would increase, regional international relations would become less erratic and more responsive to Brazilian input, and the flow of indigent economic refugees from Venezuela would be staunch. Regardless of the ideological coloring of the next Brazilian president, active Brazilian participation in the Circum-Caribbean War might favor free market policies (and so favor the Grenadines) as part of a Brazilian preference for a robust hemispheric economy and a broader alliance with the people and business of the United States. At any rate, by the time any new Brazilian administration takes possession, the war between Grenadines and Bolivarians may have reached a new scale and new definition.

The Forum of Sao Paulo (FSP). As mentioned earlier, the FSP was established in the early 1990s to find ways to move forward after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It successfully guided and funded electoral efforts to help affiliated leftist parties take control of governments throughout Latin America. Additionally, it attempted to export hard-left violent radicalism back to Spain, an

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effort several years in the making but which has only lately been fully revealed.⁸³ According to Spanish investigative journalist Alberto D. Prieto, Hugo Chávez personally signed the transfer of 6.7 million dollars to Juan Carlos Monedero, Jorge Verstryngne and Pablo Iglesias for the purpose of ‘bringing the Revolution to Spain and to struggle against capitalism’....”⁸⁴ The legacy Spanish intellectual contribution and influence in Latin America, bridge-building into Europe’s activist networks and the preparation of sanctuaries would make any inroads into the Spanish political landscape a significant FSP achievement. One measure of the success of the FSP’s Europe influence strategy might be the results of the Spanish general elections in late June 2016, in which the Forum-supported *Podemos* party came in third place⁸⁵

The FSP is suffering a disease related to its success. Several of the member political parties which gained the reins of national governments have been called to task by their country’s electorates for financial corruptions and incompetence.⁸⁶ To many observers this may be a natural consequence of centrally planned governance and statist arrangements generally. In any case, it seems to be a principal factor moving the ideological-political pendulum in the hemisphere back away from the far left.⁸⁷ Given the Marxist-Leninist penchant for group self-evaluation, the FSP has perhaps reviewed its recent setbacks.⁸⁸

Some phenomena to highlight

Although a Pandora’s boxful of unpleasantness has opened wide over the past two years in the Circum-Caribbean, more is likely on the way. Following are some categories for the unpleasantness that might be useful to analysts.

Mass Demonstrations.

In 2014, the Maduro administration in Venezuela denounced what it saw as the smoking gun of conspiracy -- communications by leading opposition intellectuals with Gene Sharp, guru of non-violent resistance.⁸⁹ Since then, forms of convocation (mostly of anti-Bolivarians) used within the region have further evolved, partly due to developments in social media, partly due to changes in relevant legal structures and partly due to effective repressive measures. The Bolivarians took effective steps to shut down, purchase or co-opt as many news outlets and as many links to the Internet as possible. In Venezuela, cell phones, blogs, and then Twitter allowed opposition activists to out-pace, for a while at least, Bolivarian efforts to limit convocational power. The gradual restriction of the press and of social media by the Venezuelan government may have added to the sense of urgency on the part of the opposition and so perhaps accelerated the timeline of active resistance. That resistance was partly successful, using its convocational capacity through the electoral process. The unicameral legislative body, the National Assembly, had been a wholly controlled instrument of the Bolivarian regime until the end of 2015 when the coalition of opposition parties (the Table of Democratic Unity party, *Mesa de Unidad Democrática*, or MUD) won a majority of seats.⁹⁰ In April 2016, that legislature propelled the first stage of a *revocatorio*, collecting and presenting to the National Electoral Board (CNE) about 1.85 million signatures, that the opposition hoped would lead to a constitutional removal of the president⁹¹

In Colombia, numerous opposition marches had been organized by activists aligned with the anti-Bolivarian Álvaro Uribe Vélez.⁹² Protests in both Colombia and Venezuela had a logical relationship to and probably an effect on the results of the October plebiscite in Colombia that

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rejected the FARC-government negotiation.⁹³ The Bolivarians recognized the convocational power of the opposition and feared that the FARC-government deal would not survive a public vote, and, in fact, the deal was voted down. The nature and process of public ratification become a debate of its own, its very necessity put in question by the Santos administration.⁹⁴ Curiously, the strategy of the Bolivarian left had become one of making constitutionalist arguments to avoid or obviate the convocational and ballot power of the opposition. It was disconcerting to many Colombians that the president of their country, Manuel Santos, had not only adopted the Bolivarian arguments, but proceeded to disdain the democratically formalized will of the electorate by disregarding the results.⁹⁵ FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri even suggested that only the FARC is morally authorized to use civil resistance.⁹⁶ Still, neither the Colombian marches against the peace accords nor the Venezuelan *revocatorio*, although organized in protest against the policies of sitting governments, had as their purpose shutting down commerce or damaging the economy in order to leverage strategic political concessions. They were evidentiary, intended to display depth of public resolve in opposition to distinct prongs of the Bolivarian enterprise, and to suggest the potential electoral and other political consequences of that resolve. Ultimately, or at least to the present, the convocational efforts in both countries have failed.

Late in October, 2016, Caracas experienced another immense public rally, this one convoking an estimated million persons to protest the Bolivarian government.⁹⁷ Of particular interest is that a group of pro-Bolivarians gathered outside the national legislative chamber, then inside to threaten physical attack on the legislators, most of whom are in the opposition. By late March, 2017, the national election commission, controlled by the Bolivarians, simply began to decertify political parties. By late April, portions of the Venezuelan public appeared to be in near-

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continuous street demonstrations.⁹⁸ In view of that kind of news, it would be dubious, as a matter of disinterested analysis, to separate the Colombian public's negative impression of the FARC from the impression the Colombian public would have of the other Bolivarian elements, particularly the Castro and Maduro regimes. For the Colombian chief executive to be compromising in negotiations with the enemies of Venezuela's populous has become an increasingly visible and ugly incongruence.⁹⁹ Bolivarianism or Bolivarian-style socialism has in fact enjoyed electoral success inside Colombia (mayoral elections in Bogota are an example). Nevertheless, many in Colombia find it evident from pronouncements coming out of Havana that the Bolivarian movement sees the political advancement of the FARC in cynical ideological terms.¹⁰⁰

Economic collapse.¹⁰¹ A 2010 report, albeit from an opposition point of view, noted that Venezuela's electric power grid was not so redundant as to survive a major social upheaval intact. Projections were for a worsening energy situation in the country, partly caused by drought conditions related to an extended 'El Nino' climate cycle and partly by mismanagement.¹⁰² Those projections proved fairly accurate.¹⁰³ Unfavorable climate and unwisely foregone physical maintenance were underlying causes of what became increasing periods of planned blackouts.¹⁰⁴ Some of the shortage can be traced directly to sweetheart international business deals among Bolivarians.¹⁰⁵ The prospects are not all negative, however, as the climate cycle, at least, finally turned for the better. Still, in mid-2017, the energy shortages continued, compounding and deepening the unraveling of the social fabric. More and more technically trained workers have been idled, and a perhaps unsustainable number of those with the wherewithal to leave the country,

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will leave. To be sure, a number of Venezuelan cities are less dependent on the main power grid than is Caracas, and the oil production infrastructure enjoys a more robust and redundant feeding of electric power. Nevertheless, long blackouts suffered in Caracas will have a secondary effect on outlying areas and even on more distant places as families escape to the support of more distant parts of their families.¹⁰⁶ Venezuela as a whole, and Colombia in turn, participate in the suffering. In spite of a considerable amount of banked wealth of all kinds, Venezuela may be nearing the end of its resilience. Economic and social disruptions that leave large numbers of young men and women unoccupied might be an underlying causal ingredient for increasing organized violence. In any case, no amount of better weather will undo the damage that has been done to Venezuelan patterns of economic life.

Refugees and displaced persons. Colombia is used to large numbers of internally displaced persons, but the movement of people in and from Venezuela is a little different. The institutions that have grown within Colombia to handle internally displaced persons do not have the appropriate geographic footprint to handle a flow that will be mostly one-way from Venezuela.¹⁰⁷ Colombia can receive large numbers of Venezuelans, without a doubt, much of the flow absorbed by dual citizenship families and border communities. However, the majority of refugees will tend toward opposition to the Venezuelan regime, and the overall flow of refugees is likely to further segregate itself along ideological lines. Such identifications will matter operationally as they may translate into targeting and recruiting, and to some degree define the sources and recipients of NGO aid support. The region is by and large one of food abundance, but it experiences seasonal shortages and shortages of key, imported items. Also, perhaps due to the rentier nature of the

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Venezuelan economy and integration into international markets, Venezuela became a net importer of foodstuffs, the distribution of which is dependent on the functioning of both internal and external transportation routes. Venezuela does not enjoy a self-sustainable economy and in the event of a more precipitous social downturn will not be independently able to feed a huge displaced population. In the past two years, the food security situation appears to have gotten markedly worse.¹⁰⁸ From mid-2016, Venezuela has presented an increasing potential for a humanitarian disaster mixing refugee flows, food shortages, inclement environmental conditions and predatory armed groups.

Prison breaks. Many observers consider that the prisons in South America are already in crisis, irrespective of an irregular war exploding around them.¹⁰⁹ Several prisons in Venezuela and Colombia have in recent years been the scenes of fatal riots and jailbreaks. The conditions have not improved in the last two years.¹¹⁰ Even a modest reduction of warden to inmate ratios could provoke an increase in system disruptions to which prison authorities would be increasingly less able to respond. Escapees would enter an environment in which the capacity of the authorities to recapture them had been all but forfeited. It is reasonable to assume that a sizeable number of escapees (accidental and otherwise) will find their way into armed groups of one flag or another. Add to this the inevitable number of newly-taken prisoners from both the Bolivarians and then Grenadines if the latter should achieve any territorial dominance. Inevitably, many of these new captives, mostly young men, will be tagged as delinquents and criminals irrespective of the natures of their alleged offenses or their states of mind. The mixture of standard delinquent felons with

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the politically motivated will yield a crossover in which many of the criminally minded seek political identity and the politically motivated are drawn into criminal behaviors and allegiances.¹¹¹

Kidnapping. In the last three decades, kidnapping has advanced as a criminal and political phenomenon to the detriment of civilization. In terms of numbers of victims, ransoms paid and impunity secured, much of that advancement in the Western Hemisphere can be credited to the FARC. Capture tactics, inventory maintenance practices, tradecraft for negotiation, communications technologies, outsourcing -- the full-stream aspects of the business model for start-up and industrial scale kidnapping can reasonably be traced to northern South America and to violent FARC entrepreneurs. Today, the subject is covered by the media when a particularly well-known person or perhaps a newsperson is kidnapped, or the number of victims is unusually high, but otherwise, kidnapping events have become so common as to no longer constitute news. Kidnapping is perhaps the most basic extortion, the most powerful and poignant protection racket. Geographically speaking, it is a racket that depends for its sustainability on the creation and maintenance of clandestine routes and sanctuaries. A supremely violent device, it is used strategically to put pressure on as many decision points as capacity will allow. For instance, it might not be practicable to kidnap the Governor's daughter, but rather to kidnap the governor's niece, or the daughters of two of the Governor's most important campaign contributors. The capacity to continue kidnapping such persons, even if ransom prices do not break even with overhead, can have a salutary (from the point of view of the kidnappers) effect on executive decision making. The wielder of the technique might not ask for the most obvious payments. Perhaps instead of a prisoner release, which might reveal too well the quid-pro-quo submission,

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the payment request might simply include favorable appointment consideration for a particular aspirant to, say, a judicial position. It is widely believed that the vast majority of kidnappings are not reported, and since the majority of high value kidnappings in the northern Andes region are attributed to large criminal organizations, especially the FARC, we can reasonably assert that the great majority of FARC kidnappings are successful. How many of them are successful in the direct inducement of political advantage is to be surmised.

In confronting kidnapping, strategically speaking, the phenomenon should perhaps not be considered as a series or composite of events to which we might have to react. Although effective reaction to even a single kidnapping may require the mobilizations of significant assets, viewing the challenge in that manner might be to surrender the initiative at the outset of our competitive designs.¹¹² We might incur greater strategic damage not so much from the kidnappings about which we are made aware, but rather from the ones that are kept secret from us. Rarely will the grabbers, the custodians, or the ransom interlocutors be the masterminds of the strategic price. For all the events to which we might react, it is the kidnapper-strategist who determines the overall objective and has the capacity to transform iterative criminal actions into greater political and geopolitical advantage. It seems, in this light, that the decisive way to address the kidnapping is to neutralize the strategists -- to kill the intellectual authorship. It also makes strategic sense to concentrate geographically on smuggling routes and their control. This is not to suggest that it is unwise to take preventive measures to secure the most valuable objects of extortion. However, it is hard to imagine a broad imposition of defensive measures that would not inherently advance a psychology of fear and therewith increase the leverage inherent in the extortion activity. Sometimes the conversation about kidnapping and executive decision-making revolves around the

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use of force in hostage recovery -- should we or should we not negotiate with kidnappers. Skipping over that debate, the ultimate solution to kidnapping as a strategic phenomenon is to eliminate the kidnapper masterminds as soon as possible. The other debates are ancillary, valid as tactical matters, but do not get to the essence -- to the violently-imposed assertion of domination and the resulting submission to it. The agreement that the Colombian government has been eager to make on behalf of the FARC has left the FARC (and maybe the ELN or their spin-offs) in better control of sanctuaries, hiding places and smuggling routes for human trafficking.

Confusion and chaos in NGOs and IOs. As part of the Bolivarian strategy to assure continuity of power and to further revolutionary objectives, Hugo Chávez secured the diplomatic vassalage of numerous countries in the region through the use of crude oil incentives.¹¹³ Another part of the Chavista/Bolivarian international strategy vision included the cooptation of regional international organizations (IOs) or the creation of new IOs with an affinity to the Bolivarian project. After attainment of the reins of national government power by the Bolivarians, Chávez' governing United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), with the help of other Forum of Sao Paulo parties, skillfully restructured the network of hemispheric regional organizations, especially the OAS, in its favor. The Forum also moved to weaken human rights-oriented voices within the OAS.¹¹⁴

As a left-leaning alternative to the OAS, The Union of South American Nations, UNASUR, dates from 2008, and is perhaps the most ambitious of several new regional IOs in that it includes a bank, an international defense treaty component, and a bureaucracy. It purposefully does not include the United States or Canada.¹¹⁵ Its thrust, as a network of

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institutions, is ultimately to create a continental socialist version of the EU. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) is a newer regional IO (circa 2011) with government membership (again, unlike the Forum of Sao Paulo, which is political party-based). Also inspired and led by the region's radical left, CELAC, like UNASUR, excludes membership by the United States and Canada. It, too, is openly and aggressively Bolivarian-progressive. The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) is composed of the core Bolivarian governments: Nicaragua, Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. It has the most *Bolivarian* thrust of economic political, social and diplomatic integration, which means disciplined coordination of all policies, which are almost invariably anti-US. The Central American Integration System (SICA) is the oddest and sloppiest of the lot, but interestingly includes the Dominican Republic. Its thrust is coordination of select economic and migratory activities and perhaps future integration. The Caribbean Community, CARICOM, is relatively old (circa 1973). It has fifteen full members, and its thrust is also, ostensibly, economic cooperation and integration. It has been heavily influenced by Venezuelan and Cuban oil diplomacy, which is perhaps now waning.¹¹⁶ Yet another organization, the Permanent Conference of Political Parties of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPPPAL) has been around since 1979 and has a party-based membership format and purpose similar to the FSP, but apparently with a bit more of a Mexican lean. It seems to be less well funded and active than the FSP has been.

Finally, the Southern Common Market, also called Mercosur, was also a Bolivarian target. It has five sovereign members: Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. Bolivia is a candidate for membership, but Venezuela's membership was suspended in 2015 for failure to meet organizational standards (human rights, democracy). Notably, Mercosur does not

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include Chile. The thrust historically has been economic cooperation and integration, but the Bolivarian thrust appeared more geopolitical, and distinctly anti-US. The Bolivarians, by way of the Venezuelan government and more especially by way of Venezuelan oil, held sway in Mercosur for a few years from about 2011 until the governments in Brazil and Argentina changed. The organization no longer appears to be in the Bolivarian camp geostrategically.

Many large issue-based NGOs, as well as many smaller NGOs are tied into regional IOs as advisory bodies. Today, millions of citizens, the majority of citizens, in both Colombia and Venezuela are openly opposing their progressive government administrations. This fact of popular opposition appears to create an ideological dilemma and confusion for many NGOs, especially those ostensibly dedicated to human and political rights, but backed by left-progressive money flows. For many casual observers, the dilemmas faced by these NGOs will be an amusement, but on the ground, ideological inconsistencies and changes of position could fuel vendettas and material waste.¹¹⁷ Future prospects in the overall Grenadine-Bolivarian war may be tied in part to the developmental and control futures of NGOs and IOs in the region. As an example, at its 2014 summit, CELAC formally took up the question of the Puerto Rican revolutionary independence movement. The CELAC voting body turned down a measure intended to admit Puerto Rican independence organizations as members of CELAC.¹¹⁸ Although not quite willing to take that step, the CELAC membership did move to openly promote Puerto Rican independence by establishing formal committees charged with studying ways to support independence organizations.¹¹⁹ In January 2016, CELAC held its annual conference in San José Costa Rica. At the plenary session of that conference, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega ceded speaking time in favor of Puerto Rican independence.¹²⁰ Making discussion space for the idea of Puerto Rican

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independence within the organization's conference time appears to be a strategic option intended to legitimize the idea and ready membership for future opportunities.¹²¹

Cross-border military and paramilitary operations. The Venezuelan government, with potential participation from other Bolivarian volunteers, could mount a limited number of special operations within Colombia and elsewhere in the region. The safest terrain in Colombia for Bolivarians to exert continuing influence would be in border zones like the Catatumbo region. Although Colombia now appears to have a central government administration that is aiding the Bolivarian movement, the majority of the Colombian population, and the great majority of Colombian military officers and personnel, will choose against the Bolivarians, including in a few of the border areas where the government and the FARC had promulgated Peasant Reservation Zones, and which now appear to have considerable geographic overlap with the '*zonas veredales*' of the demobilization process.¹²² The *Catatumbo* region is exemplary.¹²³ Further along the border toward the west, in March 2017, a platoon or two of apparently from the regular Venezuelan Army set up camp on the Colombia side of the Arauca River.¹²⁴ It is easy to suspect that the purpose had been to create a geographic distraction or to provoke an over-reaction, which did not come.

Colombia has a population almost twice that of Venezuela's, but in terms of soldiers and commanders with actual combat experience, the difference is probably beyond 50:1. Colombia is a war-toughened country. The Colombian army could train, arm and marshal huge formations of young men who could quietly suffer long marches. Bolivarian air power, in turn, might be able to do considerable damage to entering formations, but the readiness of Venezuelan combat air assets may have deteriorated in recent years, and the loyalty of many pilots to the Bolivarian regime is

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reasonably suspect. Foreign support to airpower or anti-airpower, either to the Bolivarians or to Grenadines, may become an attractive financial if not diplomatic proposition in a number of countries. Foreign materiel and training intervention also might be perceived as a relatively affordable tool for influencing the outcome of the war, carrying with it the usual financial incentives for weapons providers. Airpower assistance especially could, depending on military developments on the ground, accelerate or delay political outcomes.

Expropriation and Restitution. In 2014, this researcher predicted that the Venezuelan government would respond to the precipitous out-migration of middle class residents by expropriating residences left behind that had not been sold. It has been difficult to find solid evidence that such has occurred, although the expropriation of businesses did accelerate.¹²⁵ In any case, Venezuelan refugees are likely to maintain records of ownership and will expect restitution upon return. In many locales, from rural agricultural to urban, large numbers of eviction-restitution-relocation challenges will confront future authorities. Claims for restitution of farms and industries nationalized by the Bolivarian government as part of its decade-long process of socialization likely will be a central feature of this challenge. In Colombia, land restitution is a particularly complex aspiration stemming from decades of internal displacements, the non-transparency of past government redistributions, incomplete and inaccurate cadastral record-keeping, multiple changes in informal possessions of the same properties, and the acclimatization to urban life/de-acclimatization to rural life of many internally displaced migrants. Add to this myriad theoretical and ideological arguments regarding how real property should be used, who should administer its use and under what restrictions ownership should be placed. Although the Santos

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administration initially made rural land restitution its flagship program, related sub-programs have become the subject of intense disagreement in the shadow of the FARC accord effort. Much of the change in the azimuth of the Santos administration's restitution program seemed aimed at appeasing or at simply empowering the FARC.

Prediction of outcomes.

In 2014, this researcher stated, "the irregular war now underway in the Circum-Caribbean, replete with unique and challenging phenomena, resolute and dithering actors, and commercially valuable prizes, is likely to arrive at a new political stasis within about 4 years give or take two."¹²⁶ Approaching summer 2017, three of those years are almost over without a change in the Venezuelan government. We may be seeing a new stasis there, however, in that there is insufficient remaining power within the population at large to throw out the Bolivarian regime, either by electoral processes or by a more aggressive uprising. Barring outside intervention, Venezuela's Bolivarian government will remain in place to oversee the country's economic and social decline. The general balance of political power has changed against the Bolivarians internationally except in one most significant way: disregard by the Santos' administration in Colombia of the October plebiscite, which had rejected the power-sharing agreement with the FARC. The subsequent imposition of the accords seems at this time to be greatly advantageous to the leaders of the FARC, and to the Maduro regime in Venezuela. One of the common public complaints against the FARC agreement was its grant of impunity to FARC leaders for crimes past. The strategic effect appears much worse. Leaders of the FARC may gain enough political clout within Colombia to exert independent coercive force in areas of the country that would

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provide significant flows of illicit financing to the FARC and other Bolivarian leaders. Their impunity is not only for past transgression, but, unless there is another abrupt change in Colombian political direction, impunity of the FARC nucleus is assured for behaviors well into the future. Fortunately for US interests, the Colombian electorate that rejected the accords does not appear to be warming to the new relationship with the FARC. Grenadine control of administrative and diplomatic power, and more importantly, influence over the Colombian Armed Forces, may yet re-ascend.

The Cuban government and MININT also seem to be advantaged by the policies of the Colombian government favorable to the FARC. The Cuban communist party, with Raul Castro at its helm, is still in power in Cuba, and the Cuban regime continues to assist, support and guide if not control Venezuela's government. It strongly influences the FARC, the ELN and other illegal and anti-American organizations in the hemisphere. Regardless of any potential ideological realignments in Brazil's federal government, it behooves militant leftist organizations inside Brazil (many associated with the Forum of Sao Paulo) to have the Bolivarians remain in control of Venezuela. This is probably true as well for pro-Islamist regimes and organizations.¹²⁷ If Brazil turns sharply away from the progressivist movement, leftist organizations known to have allied with or to have harbored radical Islamists may have to react to a more aggressive level of pursuit by government law-enforcement. They will need the escape valve that the Bolivarians would likely provide.

Long-term resolution of the Circum-Caribbean War would most likely favor US interests and security if implementation of the FARC accords were halted and reversed and Colombians were to opt instead (as they did circa 2002) for a robust military confrontation against the FARC.

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At this point in time, however, such a change may be politically impossible. How other countries in the hemisphere might further the ouster of Nicolás Maduro and the prospects of the anti-Bolivarians within Venezuela, becomes the central question. Is there potential for anti-Bolivarian armed action there, perhaps supported multi-nationally? While this would almost necessarily entail a violent response led by the organized Cuban presence, the Venezuelan military might prove generally unwilling to attack its own citizens. If the Brazilians were to side, at least diplomatically, with the Grenadines, the outcome could be definitive, leaving most Venezuelans and the Colombians in a more secure position, at least in the long run. A forced removal of the Bolivarians from power in Venezuela could facilitate the return of Venezuelan exiles, enhance Brazil's geopolitical stature and augment its influence in South America's northern tier. By supporting Colombians opposed to the Bolivarians, Brazil would assume greater influence in the region without posturing itself as an adversary. Venezuelans would greet a period of intense political re-structuring, and navigate a more positive economic azimuth.

Millions of mostly poor Venezuelans, however, are likely to retain their affection and allegiance to the precepts and projects of Bolivarian socialism. As such, political discord will continue in Venezuela even if all the formal Bolivarian structures were to collapse. Venezuelans will experience an extended period of material and emotional suffering regardless of the near-term outcomes of the war, especially in those families forced to displace or that will have lost loved ones to the violence.

If FARC sanctuaries inside Venezuela could be shriveled and FARC's international diplomatic support likewise reduced, Colombian leaders might reasonably return to dealing harshly, militarily with that organization, its remnants, dissidents and spinoffs. The level of

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guerrilla warfare in Colombia, and of organized violence generally, may not be subsiding as much as cheerleaders of the ‘post-conflict’ might be hoping. Whether from re-flagged Bolivarian elements or from anti-Bolivarian armed groups, violence in rural Colombia may be continuing.¹²⁸

The Grenadine-Bolivarian irregular war can be reasonably characterized as a bow-wave conflict of the Cold War, pitting liberal constitutionalism against a modernized (postmodern?) form of Marxist left-totalitarianism. The ideological leaders and political motivators of this aggressive, post-Soviet Marxism were founders or first heirs of seemingly anachronistic 60s-70s communist organizations. Now these leaders are being forced by age as much as by adversaries to concede to a younger set of leaders. It is harder in 2017 than it was in 2014 to see a peaceful path toward victory for constitutional liberalism, even while the ideological pendulum in Latin America has clearly been swinging away from the far left in the past few years. Unless Colombians manage to terminally dispose of the proposed accords with the FARC, there will exist inside Colombia a formula for increase organized armed violence.¹²⁹ The actions and consequences of the Colombian and Venezuelan struggles extend to all of the countries of Central America, the Caribbean, and the northern Andes. The Bolivarian enterprise is one that adheres to the use of all means of struggle. ‘All means’ includes, prominently, organized armed violence. The Bolivarian movement is a function, dimension, variation and prized activity of the Forum of Sao Paulo. Neither of these collective identities are mentioned in US strategic or regional policy statements.¹³⁰ They are nevertheless anti-liberal and anti-United States. Success of the Forum of Sao Paulo’s leadership, of its member organizations, and of the Bolivarian movement in particular, is in balance detrimental to US national interests. Although the long swing of the ideological pendulum in South America is now disfavoring the Forum, the Bolivarians seem in firm control of the

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Venezuelan armed forces and greatly benefit from the concessions awarded to the FARC by the Colombian government. Success by the FARC negotiators has probably helped the communist party in Cuba maintain continuity of control past the retirement of Raul Castro. It may also have helped shore up the Bolivarian regime of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. As it appears in early-2017, encouraging developments to the contrary notwithstanding, the general prospects of the Circum-Caribbean War continue unfavorable for the United States.

Venezuelans living in Venezuela can no longer effect positive political change by themselves. That is to say, without aggressive, outside initiative in opposition not just to the sitting leadership of the party in power, but against the Bolivarian movement as a whole, Venezuela's population is condemned to a leftist tyrannical dictatorship and Venezuelan society will devolve further toward the Cuban model. This in turn will weaken the Colombian economy. The cultivation and movement of illegal recreation drugs will continue to expand, routes through Venezuela will remain open and sanctuaries inside Venezuela will remain available for all manner of criminal and guerrilla organizations. In other words, the prospects for a significant improvement in Colombian human security is forfeit to conditions of impunity there and in neighboring Venezuela. If the Bolivarians remain at large and further solidify their impunity within Venezuela, Colombia as a liberal republic may be doomed.

At this time, little authority of any kind is actively pursuing Bolivarians for past transgressions or for ongoing illegalities and rights violations. The extent of Bolivarian geographic sanctuary may be growing, and their lines of communication becoming more secure. Bolivarians have lost some international sympathy due to the miserable economic performance of the Venezuelan administration, but this loss is partially offset by the internationally popular FARC

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accords in Colombia. Unless and until there is increased, physical opposition to Bolivarian impunity in the form of active, physical pursuit and destruction of Bolivarian leadership, US interests are likely to be negatively affected in the following ten ways: Human rights violations will continue, to include human trafficking; Cocaine and heroin production and their transnational trafficking will flourish; The United States will lose biometrics capability within the region, this as unregulated and undocumented migration flows will likely increase; Environmental degradation in the region will accelerate; Support for the United States in International Forums will further decline; Strategic adversaries may gain significant military staging space; Strategic adversaries may gain increased, preferential access to key strategic mineral resources; The United States may lose significant influence over valuable hydrocarbon market elements; Countries in the region may move away from the region's nuclear-free tradition; and the overall value of the region will decline as an economic partner for the United States. All in all, not a good result.

¹ Charles Hagel. *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*. Washington D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2014, p. 6.

² See generally, John F. Kelly, *Posture Statement of Commander, United States Southern Command, before the 113th Congress House Armed Services Committee*. Washington, D. C.: United States Congress, 2014.

³ See, for instance, Rand, 2015, Rand, 2016, ArroyoAnnual_2015.pdf; Rand, *Choices for America in a Turbulent World*, Santa Monica: Rand, 2015, RAND__RR1114.pdf. This document's chapters "examine in more detail the choices to be faced in Europe, the Middle East and South Asia, and East Asia."

⁴ Humberto de la Calle, Iván Márquez, et al. *Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera* (Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace), Bogotá: National Government and FARC-EP, 24, August, 2016.

⁵ Geoffrey Demarest, "The Circum-Caribbean (or Bolivarian-Grenadine) War," *Small Wars Journal*, October, 2014, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-circum-caribbean-or-Bolivarian-Grenadine-war>.

⁶ See, on this point, Nelson Ricardo Matta Colorado, "Autopistas de las economías ilegales," *El Colombiano*, 26 February 2017, <http://m.elcolombiano.com/autopistas-de-las-economias-ilegales-LF6034872>.

⁷ See, for instance, 'fotos manifestaciones caracas' in Google Images.

⁸ See, for instance, Leopoldo E. Colmenares G. "La Exportación de la 'Revolución Bolivariana' hacia América Latina" (Export of the Bolivarian Revolution in Latin America), *Military Review* (Spanish language edition), January-February, 2011, pp. 8-23; Max G. Manwarring, *Venezuela as an Exporter of 4th Generation Warfare Instability Carlisle Barracks*, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012; see also, J. Lee Bennett, *A game of Simon Says: Latin America's Left Turn and Its Effects on US Security*, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air Command and Staff College, Air University Press, 2008.

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⁹ See, for instance, Ana Maria Salazar, “Análisis sin fronteras, Venezuela: Pronóstico reservado” (Analysis without borders: Venezuela: Prognosis uncertain), April 17, 2014,

<http://www.elimparcial.com/Columnas/DetalleColumnas/1132007-Analisis-sin-Fronteras-Ana-Maria-Salazar.html>.

¹⁰ See for instance, Alfredo Coronil. “La Junta Patriótica Estudiantil y Popular Rechaza la Complicidad...” (The Patriotic Popular Student Board Rejects Complicity...), *ForoLibertad, Para rescatar el porvenir* (blog of Alfredo Coronil Hartmann), April 17, 2014, <http://pararescatarelporvenir.blogspot.com/>; see also, Caracas/EFE, “Diálogos en Venezuela no son para negociar, según Gobierno,” *Portafolio.com*, April 9 de 2014, <http://www.portafolio.co/internacional/crisis-venezuela-y-efectos-colombia>.

¹¹ DolarToday, “¡A MIRAFLORES! Rectoras del CNE suspenden proceso de recolección del 20% de las firmas para el Revocatorio,” (To Miraflores! Rectors of the National Election Commission suspend the collection process for the signatures of 20% toward the revocation vote), *DolarToday*, 20 October 2016,

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⁶⁷ Editors, “Sangre y armas: Los incendiarios discursos de Diosdado, Aristóbulo y Bernal” (Blood and arms: The incendiary speeches of Diosdado, Aristóbulo and Bernal), *La Patilla*, 6 April 2017, <https://www.lapatilla.com/site/2017/04/06/sangre-y-armas-los-incendiaros-discursos-de-diosdado-aristobulo-y-bernal/>. “Cabello también afirmó que “la mayoría de soldados y soldadas de la fuerzas armadas están muy claros.” That top Bolivarian leaders are bragging that most of the soldiers are loyal seems itself an admission that many are not.

⁶⁸ On a local perspective regarding Russian arms transfers see, Fausta Rodríguez, “Venezuela: Misery and missiles” *Datechguy*, April 25, 2014, <http://datechguyblog.com/2014/04/25/venezuela-misery-and-missiles/>.

⁶⁹ See, on this point, “Rutas del Bachaqueo de Gasolina entre Venezuela – Colombia” (Gasoline Smuggling Routes Between Venezuela and Colombia), *NoticiasVenezuela*, Aug 24, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__VX4xv_QDw; <https://dolartoday.com/video-capturados-con-camara-escondida-militares-venezolanos-controlan-el-trafico-de-gasolina-hacia-colombia/>. During a run, some smugglers are stopped multiple times to pay local tolls, usually at roadblocks attended by armed personnel. At one stop depicted in the video, three apparently unarmed men dressed in civilian clothes wave down the smugglers, who quickly pay each of the three. The smugglers claim the three represent the FARC, ELN and Venezuelan National Guard, respectively.

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⁷⁰ Editors, “Régimen chavista aparece nombrado 240 mil veces en el mega caso de corrupción de Panamá Papers,” *DólarToday*, 5 April 2016, <https://dolartoday.com/regimen-chavista-aparece-nombrado-240-mil-veces-en-el-mega-caso-de-corrupcion-de-panama-papers/>.

⁷¹ Such simple use of math can mislead. The demographic strength of the Venezuelan opposition is used clumsily as a proxy for the whole. Popular support is but one ingredient of a successful insurgent challenge, and neither a correct, optimal, nor necessary amount of popular support for successful insurgency has ever been calculated or, to perhaps even proposed. See, Rafael Nieto Loaiza, “Venezuela: Triunfo de cristal” (Venezuela: Glass Victory), *El Colombiano*, 13 December 2015, <http://www.elcolombiano.com/opinion/columnistas/triunfo-de-cristal-GC3271228>. Other ingredients, however, to include financial resources, competent leadership, foreign support, etcetera, are also available to the Venezuelan opposition.

⁷² Editors, “¡Jugada Sucia! Estado de Excepción le quita competencias directas a la Asamblea Nacional” (Dirty Play! State of Exception takes direct Powers away from the National Assembly), *Maduradas*, 16 May 2016, <http://www.maduradas.com/jugada-sucia-estado-de-excepcion-le-quita-competencias-directas-a-la-asamblea-nacional/>.

⁷³ Editors, “¡Una Bomba de Tiempo a Punto de Explotar! Crisis venezolana entra en una peligrosa etapa de tensiones” (A Time Bomb about to Explode! Venezuelan Crisis enters a dangerous period of tensions), *DólarToday*, 16 May 2016, <https://dolartoday.com/venezuela-es-una-bomba-de-tiempo-crisis-venezolana-entra-en-una-nueva-etapa-de-tensiones/>.

⁷⁴ For some insight into regional intelligence intrigue and relevant activities of Cuba’s MININT, see, for instance, Ricardo Puentes Melo, “El G2 cubano.. ¿Qué tan criminales son?” (Cuban G2...How criminal are they?), *Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 29 December 2014, <http://www.periodismosinfronteras.org/g2-cubano-criminales.html>.

⁷⁵ Editors, “Maduro firma acuerdo bilateral con Cuba por USD 1.428 M,” *Sumarium.com*, 4 April 2016, <http://sumarium.com/maduro-firma-acuerdo-bilateral-con-cuba-por-usd-1-428-m/>; Nicolle Yapur, “Cuba se ha llevado 39% de la solidaridad petrolera” (Cuba Has Carried Away 39% of the Oil [fiscal] Contribution), August 25, 2014, http://www.el-nacional.com/economia/Cuba-llevado-solidaridad-petrolera_0_468553223.html.

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⁷⁷ Editors, “¡Le Sacan el Cuerpo a Maduro! China se limpia las manos con Venezuela en su crisis económica” (They Throw Maduro under the Bus! China washes its hands with regard to Venezuela in its economic crisis), *DólarToday and Reuters*, 16 May 2016, <https://dolartoday.com/le-sacan-el-cuerpo-maduro-china-se-limpia-las-manos-con-venezuela-en-su-crisis-economica/>.

⁷⁸ Sara Hsu, “China Isn’t Giving Up On Venezuela Just Yet,” *Forbes*, 8 October 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahsu/2016/10/08/china-isnt-giving-up-on-venezuela-just-yet/#b56834511ecb>.

⁷⁹ On the attractiveness of the Chinese economic model see, Trevor Cohen, “A Tale of Culture and Ideology,” *Fair Observer*, December 6, 2012, <http://www.fairobserver.com/article/tale-culture-and-ideology>; “Moreover, the so called “Beijing Consensus” has resonated most strongly in Cuba, a communist country now in the process of experimenting with economic liberalization. For the Cubans, China represents a model of how to liberalize an economy, while avoiding the question of the social and political reform. It provides a guide for the Cuban Communist Party to maintain its direct control over the economy, politics, and daily life, while simultaneously allowing for reforms to increase the efficiency of the Cuban economy,” Ibid.

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⁸¹ Vladimir Putin, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016) *MFA Russia*, 1 December 2016, page 25. The forums of express interest to the Russians are: The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC); The Southern Common Market, (Mercosur); The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR); The Central American Integration System, (SICA); The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA); The Pacific Alliance; and The Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

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⁸³ Alberto D. Prieto, “Podemos recibió 6 millones de dólares de Chávez para hacer ‘la revolución’ en España,” *OK Diario*, Madrid 5 April 2016, <http://okdiario.com/espana/chavez-firmo-la-concesion-de-67-millones-de-dolares-a-iglesias-errejon-y-verstrynge-102212>. Juan Carlos Monedero, Jorge Verstrynge and Pablo Iglesias are owners of the Foundation Center of Political and Social Studies (CEPS), a Valencia based organization ostensibly dedicated to the promotion of progressivism and the struggle against neo-capitalism.

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